STUMPTOWN™

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The Case of the Baby in the Velvet Case

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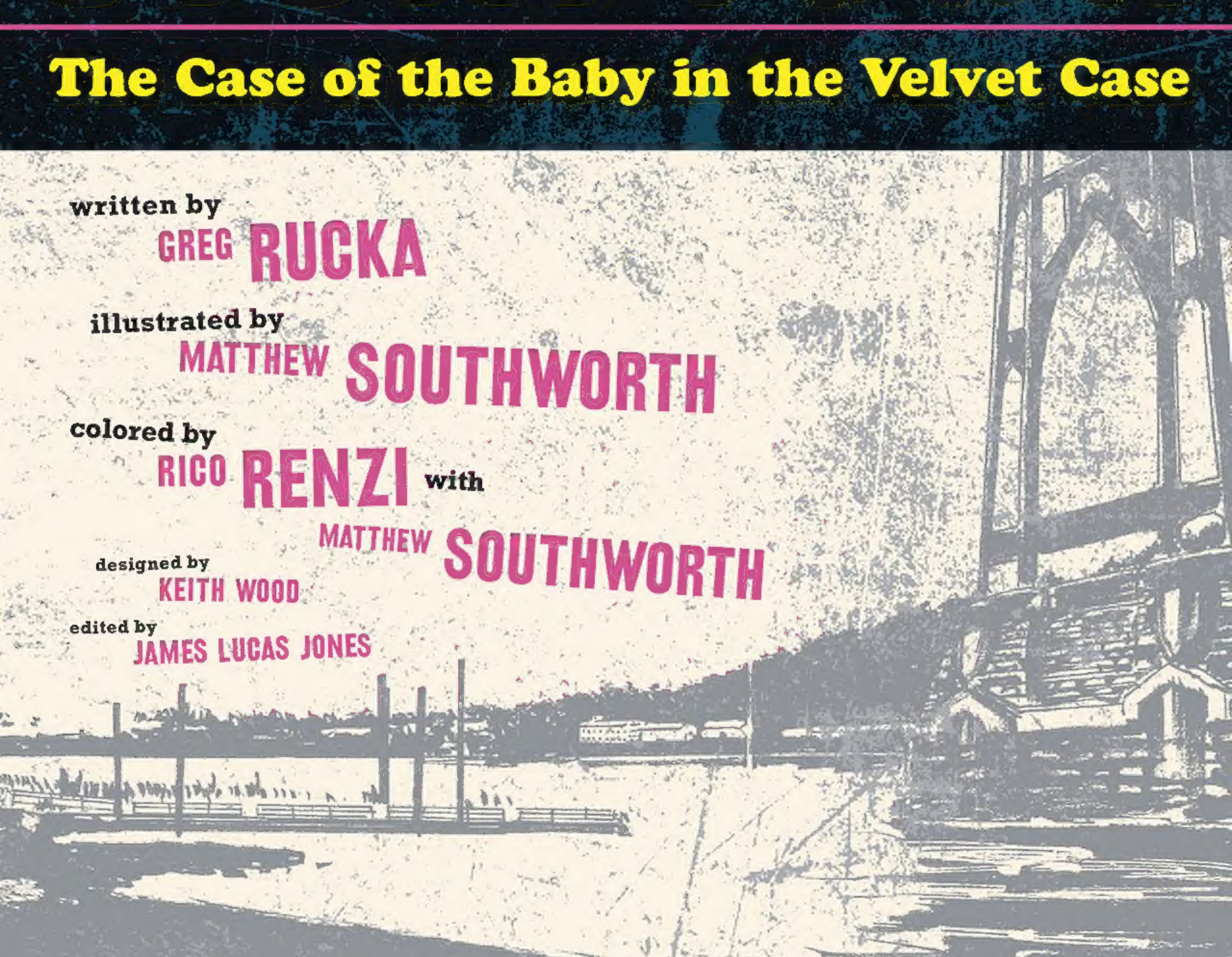

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OKAY, I CAN SEE THIS GOING A *NUMBER* OF WAYS.

FIRST, YOU GUYS DO SOMETHING *DUMB* AND I GET TO SHOOT YOU.

THAT'S HONESTLY MY *PREFERENCE.* I *REALLY* DON'T LIKE YOU GUYS.

YOU'RE *RACISTS,* YOU'RE *IDIOTS,* YOU'RE *VIOLENT,* AND YOU *BROKE* INTO MY *OFFICE...*

...SO THE *SELF-DEFENSE* PLEA IS A *NO-BRAINER,* REALLY.

THE *OTHER* WAY THIS GOES IS YOU *SIT TIGHT* WHILE WE WAIT FOR THE *COPS* OR THE *D.E.A.* TO ARRIVE.

THEN YOU GET TO TELL THEM ALL ABOUT YOUR LITTLE *DRUG-SMUGGLING* OPERATION, MAYBE--

BABY!

LET ME SEE HER! IS SHE *OKAY?*

MIM, DAMMIT, I *TOLD* YOU TO *WAIT* OUT--

I KNOW, I JUST *WANTED* TO--

OW!

OW *OW OW*

I'M *SORRY!* DEX, I'M *SO* SORRY!

GRAB HER!

WHO?

HER, YOU FUCKING *IDIOT!*

GIVE HER *BACK--*

GO, LET'S *GO!*

GET YOUR HANDS *OFF* OF ME!

YOU HURT HER, AND I WILL FUCKING *SHOOT* YOU IN *EACH* OF YOUR PIGGY LITTLE *EYES.*

LET HER GO.

SHIT!

DAMMIT! *DAMMIT!*

CALL THE POLICE!

MIM—

THEY HAVE BABY!

GO GO GO GO GO!

OH, NOT ON YOUR *LIFE.*

THEY'VE GOT BABY!

GO *AWAY!*

HURRY!

YOU'RE GOING TO *LOSE* THEM!

GET OUT OF *MY CAR,* MIM!

I DON'T SEE THEM!

DON'T *TALK* TO ME!

YOU DON'T *GET* TO TALK TO ME--

--I *TOLD* YOU TO *WAIT*, I *TOLD* YOU TO GET OUT OF MY *CAR*--

--YOU *EVER* DO WHAT YOU'RE *TOLD*?

WHO'RE *YOU*, MY *MOTHER*?

DAMMIT, MIM!

PUT ON YOUR *SEATBELT!*

I'M *TRYING!*

YOUR *STUPID* CAR DOESN'T STUPID HAVE ONE!

IT'S A *LAP BELT,* DAMMIT! PUT IT *ON!*

OH, YOU THINK SO, MOTHERFUCKER?

WHAT ARE THEY *DOING?*

GET *DOWN.*

WHAT?

GET DOWN!

THEY'RE *SHOOTING* AT *US? WHY* ARE THEY *SHOOTING* AT *US?*

I THINK MAYBE THEY DON'T WANT US FOLLOWING THEM, MIM.

STAY *DOWN.*

SHIT.

PLEASE DON'T.

St John's Br

POLICE

ST. JOHN'S BRIDGE...

...I GOT *SHOT* HERE, YOU KNOW THAT?

LET ME *OUT.*

YOU SHOULD'VE *GONE* BEFORE WE LEFT.

I *HAVE* TO GET *OUT* OF THIS *CAR!*

ABOUT FUCKING TIME.

WHAT DOES *THAT* MEAN? IT'S THE *POLICE!*

YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS IF I GET *ARRESTED?* WITH *YOU?* LIKE *THIS??*

I'LL BE ON *T.M.Z.* UNTIL THE END OF *TIME!*

MIM--

--SHUT *UP!*

...YOU JUST RAN OUT OF *ROAD.*

GOT CHA, ASSHOLE...

HANDS!

LET ME SEE YOUR *HANDS!*

PORTLAND

IT'S *OKAY*, IT'S--

DROP IT, *NOW!*

BOTH OF YOU, I WANT TO SEE *HANDS!*

EVERYONE OUT OF THE *CARS!*

NOBODY MOVES.

PORTLAND POLICE

I AM OUT WITH FOUR SUSPECTS SOUTH OF CATHEDRAL PARK AT--

KNHHNN

KRAK

KRAK KRAK KRAK

GET IN THE CAR!

KRAK

MIM!

BABY!

KRAK

PING

YEAH, NO.

MIM! FOR THE LOVE OF GOD_

-RUN!

KRAK

KRAK

KLK

KLK

MICK!

COME ON, DAMMIT!!

PORTLAN

OFFICER DOWN, SHOTS FIRED! THEY TOOK MY UNIT, I REPEAT, TWO SUSPECTS, WHITE MALE--

YOU'RE WILLING TO *DIE* FOR A *GUITAR?*

IT'S *NOT* JUST A *GUITAR!*

YOU CAN *BUY* ANOTHER ONE, MIM! YOU CAN BUY *FIVE HUNDRED* OTHER ONES! YOU'RE *RICH!*

AW, *SHIT!*

THAT *CAN'T* BE *THEM.*

THAT *CAN'T* BE *THEM!*

KEEP SAYING IT, MAYBE THEY'LL *BELIEVE* YOU.

THEY *SHOT* A *COP,* MIM.

THEY DON'T HAVE *ANYTHING* LEFT TO *LOSE.*

HOLD ON.

20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

UNIVERSITY OF

20 MPH

UHMM—

--CLIFF CLIFF CLIFF JESUS CHRIST DEX--

BRAKE

--TURN!!!!

DAMMIT...

...WHERE THE HELL ARE THE COPS?

60 70 80 90 100 110
ONLY
ONLY

WHAT ARE *WE* DOING? WE'RE JUST *RUNNING* AWAY?

WE'RE GIVING THE *COPS* TIME--

--THEY KNOW THAT *CAR* HAS BEEN STOLEN, ONE OF THEIR OWN HAS BEEN *SHOT*--

--JUST NEED A *ROADBLOCK*...

...OR SOMETHING...

HEH.

YEAH...

HEH? *HEH!?*

...THIS MAY *SUCK*, JUST TO WARN YOU.

WAIT, WHAT ARE YOU *DOING?*

DEX? DEX!

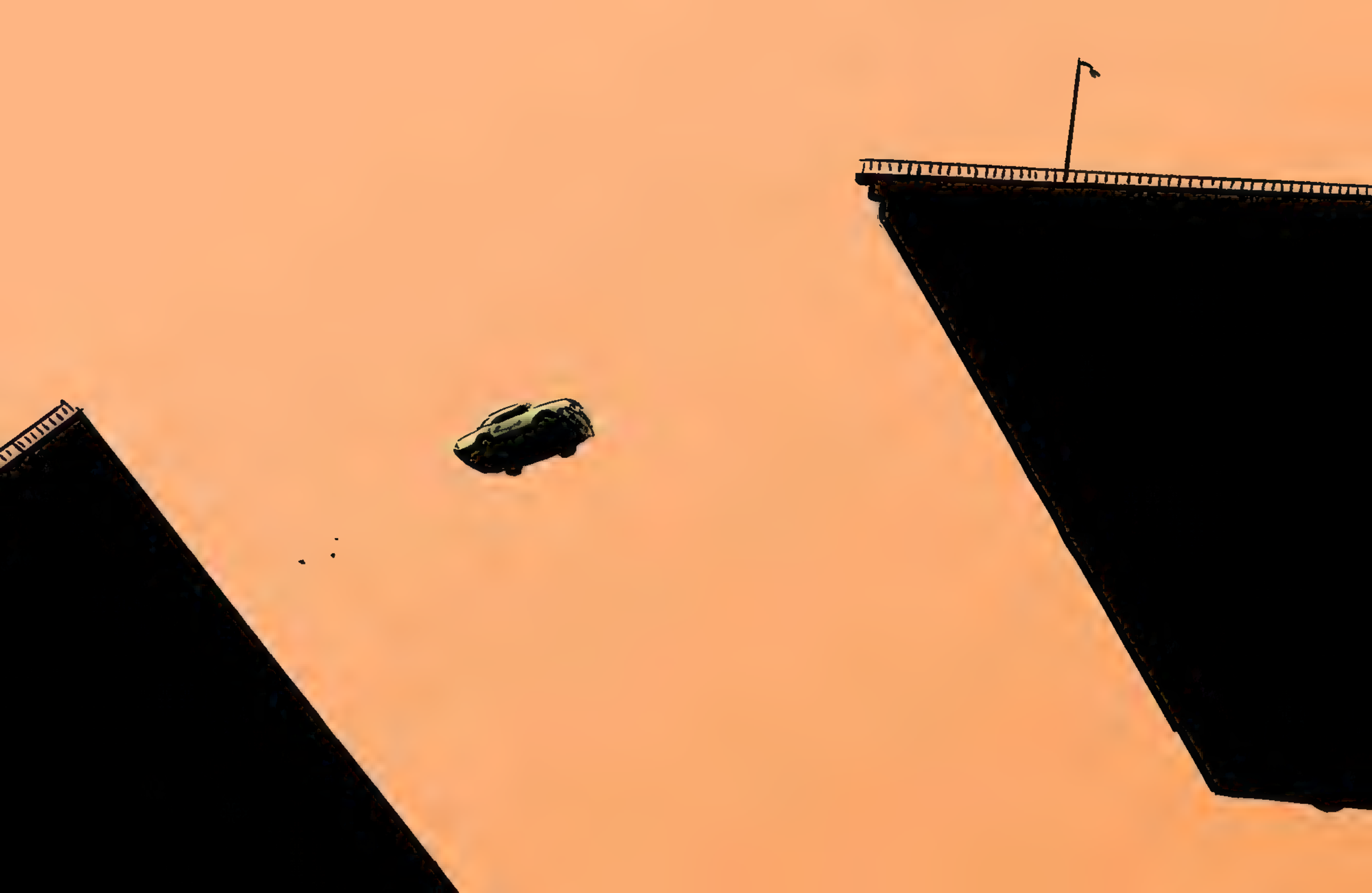
OH MY *GOD.*

OH MY GOD OH MY GOD--

--OHMYGODOHMYGODOHMYGOD--

C'MON.

YOU KNOW YOU *WANT* TO...



KRRNNNCH

SO...

...WAS
IT GOOD
FOR YOU?

WHY P.I.? PART FOUR — THIS MUST BE THE PLACE

We're headed into the tall grass, bear with me.

Prior to this, I've held forth about the nature of the PI as an American literary form uniquely suited to social commentary, both in narrative and character. I've talked a bit about the nature of that character, her motivations, and those iconic traits that—regardless of how the character may be dressed-up—remain consistent throughout the form. We've talked about the Code, and Honor, and the fact that the PI, by design, is a liminal character, further augmenting that ability to render observation and judgment of their world.

Spenser had Boston. Scudder has Manhattan. Warshawski has Chicago. Marlowe had Los Angeles, but Elvis Cole evicted him long ago. Holmes had (or has?) London. The list goes on, and on, and on.

There's a reason this series is called *Stumptown* and not *Dex Parios, P.I.*, after all. This book you're holding in your hand or reading on the digital device du jour or a monitor is a book named after a place, and that place isn't Portland, Oregon, though it bears some marked similarities, to be certain. No, this is a town called Stumptown, the Heart of Cascadia, the Bridge City, the City of Roses. This is a town that reflects and twists the image of Portland, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. This is Portland, but it isn't. And its name is in the title, because the setting is as much a primary character as Dex herself. The name is in the title because the place imposes itself on the story. The name is in the title because—regardless of the crime or the case—the fact that they happen *here* is fundamental.

American literature has a strong current of Place running throughout, and this makes perfect sense if one thinks about it. The national identity is grounded in exploration, and this pioneering urge manifests in location as much as in character; the two, in fact, go hand-in-hand. As I stated in Part One, it's no accident that the PI is born from the cowboy, and the cowboy, in turn, is born of the pioneer. The frontier, wild and lawless, must be tamed.

Westward ho, indeed.

There are obvious political issues this raises, especially with the convenient and rampant disregard for the First Peoples. The question of the Land and who owns it, who controls it, is a recurring element of the form, ranging from thematic inclusion (I direct you to the late Grandmaster Tony Hillerman) to pure plot (*Chinatown*, another PI tale with place rather than character in its title). This, too, is a legacy left to the PI by the cowboy, the homesteader versus the rancher, the farmer versus the railroads. The root of the American dream, even today, remains the desire to have a place to call your own; even today, power and wealth are held by those who own the land and who then dictate what is to be done upon it. This is the heart of the Occupy Movement. This is the battle still raging over a piece of virtual real estate called the Internet.

And power corrupts, and thus the Land is corrupt, and so the Place our hero must walk is too corrupted. But our hero, liminal by design, can do something we do not, something that—to me, at least—has always been a gleeful, if only by proxy, indulgence. The PI doesn't care about borders, and the PI doesn't care about fences or gates or bouncers or bodyguards. The PI moves freely across the land, from the low Places to the high. The PI can enter the crack house as easily as the country club.

How she can do this is a fair question. The dramatic dividends aside—and let's face it, I've been talking a lot more about interpretations of text than about crafting of narrative and the Power of the Author to Make the Character Do What I Say—I'd argue a separate reason entirely. The PI is—almost universally, at least—of the Place. Her relationship with the Land is as crucial as her adherence to her Code. The PI and the Place are inextricably, and tightly, bound, though how this manifests can vary. Some hold an almost romantic attachment to their Place, while others seemingly detest it. But in almost every case I can think of, the PI's understanding of the Land and their ability to negotiate it, to know its secrets and its hidden corners and who has planted their flag where, is intimate and almost supernatural.

The PI is the Champion of their Place, and thus Place becomes less a physical location or setting, but rather an ideal. What their home should be, or what their city could become, or even—sometimes—the memory of what their Place once was, and could be again. Place becomes not solely the land or the buildings or the parks or the bars, but the people who live there.

Stumptown isn't called *Stumptown* out of any desire to protect the innocent or obscure the guilty of the "real" Portland, Oregon. *Stumptown* is called *Stumptown* because it's Dex's place, and it's where her fealty lies. *Stumptown* is her ideal, and, in the twisted, symbiotic relationship between PI and Place, she is what Stumptown needs. They exist in concert, in service to one another. Stumptown will abuse her, cheat on her, taunt her, tease her, and Dex may even stray to play the field. But in the end, Dex will return, because as much as Stumptown is her home, it's more; it's who she is.

It's her Place.

GREG RUCKA, PORTLAND, OREGON

EVIL